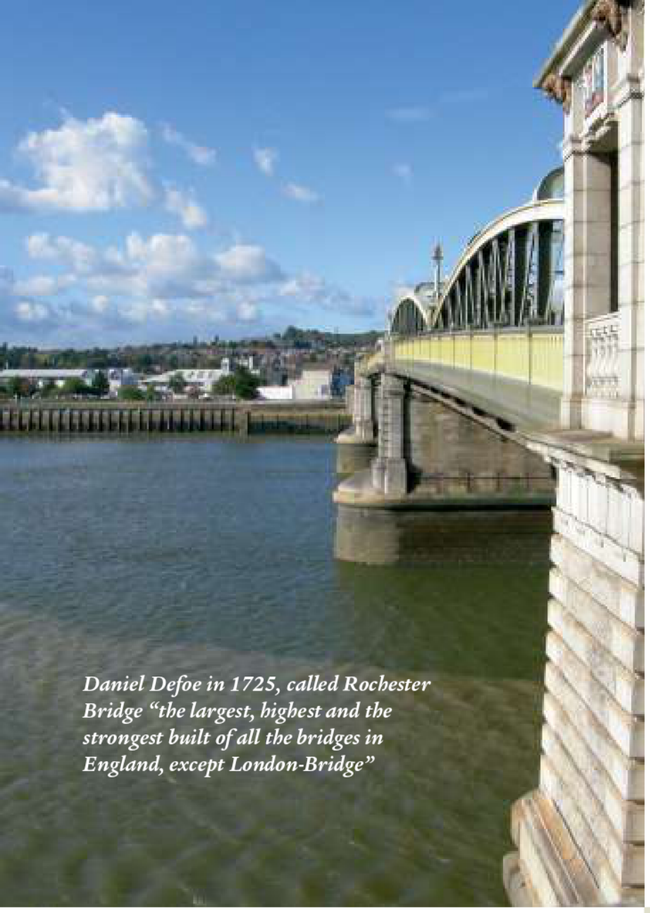


Daniel Defoe in 1725, called Rochester Bridge "the largest, highest and the strongest built of all the bridges in England, except London-Bridge"

Introduction

Part of the conglomeration of towns known as the Medway Towns, Strood alone sits on the northwestern bank of the River Medway. Many of the street names reflect a tie to the past, when much of the land belonged to the Earls of Darnley.

The Trail has been created by community volunteers to encourage families to walk, explore and enjoy the many varied and wonderful aspects of our neighbourhood.

We have chosen the Knights Templar as our theme and logo for the route signs as Strood was an important place when the knights rested here on the way to Canterbury, Dover and far-off lands. Strood is still an important link, with the new high-speed trains taking people far and wide.

Regeneration and new developments are everywhere and the Strood Community Trail is part of this new beginning, making Strood a place we are proud to live in.

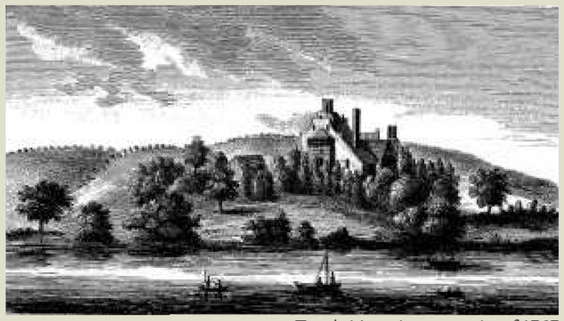
"On either side the banks of the Medway, covered with cornfields and pastures, with here and there a windmill or a distant church, stretched away as far as the eye could see, presenting a rich and varied landscape. The river, reflecting the clear blue of the sky, glistened and sparkled as it flowed noiselessly on; and the oars of the fishermen dipped into the water with a clear and liquid sound as the heavy but picturesque boats glided slowly down the stream."

Charles Dickens, The Pickwick Papers

Temple Manor and the Knights Templar

Much of Strood was a royal manor until Henry II gave it to the Knights Templar around 1159. This was an order of monastic soldiers established during the Crusades to protect Christian pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land. The order became extremely wealthy and powerful until the early 14th century when the order was suppressed throughout Europe.

Temple Manor is part of a range of buildings assembled by the Knights, which included a timber hall, barns, kitchens and stables. The stone building which has survived was added around 1240. The brick extensions date from the 17th century.



Temple Manor in an engraving of 1767

Temple Manor is open to the public from 1 April to 31 October
Saturday and Sunday, 11am to 4pm.
Open for groups at other times by prior arrangement.
Free admission. 01634 402276.

A traditional nickname for the inhabitants of Strood is "Kentish longtails". King Henry II had quarrelled with Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. One of Henry's knights, Robert de Broc, sent his nephew to waylay Becket on the road just outside Strood and cut off his horse's tail. The legend says that as a result, de Broc's descendants and all the people of Strood were cursed by Becket to ever after be born with tails.

Frindsbury Parish Church, All Saints, sits near the edge of a steep escarpment of an old quarry where chalk was excavated for the cement industry. Fragments of the church are from the Saxon period, older than Rochester Cathedral! This is the only churchyard in Medway which still has burials.

This trail is part of the Valley of Visions Community Trails project, encouraging people to enjoy, explore and learn about their local area and surrounding countryside. Why not explore one of the other community trails in the Medway Gap?
Visit **www.valleyofvisions.org.uk** for further information.

For more information about Strood visit:
www.medway.gov.uk

Thanks to the following for their assistance with the Strood Community Trail project:
Friends of Rede Common, Friends of Broomhill Park, Strood Community Project, St Nicholas Church, St Francis of Assisi Church, local ward councillors and Medway Highways Department.

Valley of Visions

Supported by The National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund | heritage lottery fund

There were two substantial breweries in Strood at the start of the 19th century, at which time hops were grown lower down the Medway Valley. From the 1830s the industry increased and hop-growing spread to Frindsbury and Strood.

In the 19th century, prize-fighting would take place on the marshes of the Medway and spectators travelled by boat from Strood Pier. On one occasion the boat was so overloaded that it sank and many top hats were carried away by the tide!

Shipbuilding was an important industry here at the end of the 18th century due to the Napoleonic Wars. Wood for shipbuilding came from the nearby North Downs and along the river from the Weald.

The Thames and Medway Canal

The Thames and Medway Canal, opened in 1824, linked the two rivers by tunnelling through the Hoo Peninsula, shortening the passage to London for boats and barges by 40 miles. A straight 2¼ mile tunnel was dug out with pick and shovel through the chalk hills from Strood to Higham. In 1845 it was sold to the railway who drained it and installed tracks through the tunnel. The railway still passes through the tunnel and the brick entrance can be seen just north of Strood station at Frindsbury. In 1969 the Strood Basin was filled in and a housing estate built on the site. The lock gates remain as a reminder of this part of Strood's heritage.

The lower lying areas of Strood have always been prone to flooding. During the flood of 1898 boats could be rowed up the high street. The two flood gates on Canal Road are still closed when high tide threatens.

COMMUNITY TRAILS
IN THE MEDWAY GAP

Strood

Rede Common

Known locally as Sandy Banks due to the underlying geology of sandstone. Twenty-five acres of open space on the doorstep of many Strood residents. It was formerly farmland used for grazing, arable and market gardening. It is now an area of open grasslands surrounded by scrub and trees with many informal pathways and is loved by many locals. The grass is left to grow tall giving a wonderful wild feel as it billows in the breeze and is a riot of noise in the summer with grasshoppers and crickets. Abundant bramble and scrub is home to many ground nesting birds like the willow warbler, chiffchaff, whitethroat and blackcap.

On a single day in May the RSPB recorded 29 different bird species. In autumn the ripening fruit of blackberries, haws, damsons, sloes, walnut and apples provided food for a host of birds, insects and mammals. Sparrowhawks are frequent visitors and a good indicator of the health of the common and its food chain.

The Friends of Rede Common, a volunteer group, co-manage the site with Medway Green Spaces team.

Willow warbler

www.andywdler.co.uk

Broomhill Park

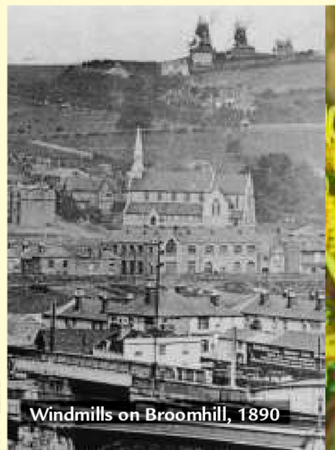
Until the 1970s a prefab estate was here and there are naturalized trees and shrubs that were originally part of someone's garden – chestnuts, gooseberries, blackberries, damsons, cob nuts, rose hips and haws.

Thanks to a lottery grant awarded to the Friends of Broomhill, some self-seeded trees have been cleared opening the 360° view of the Thames to the north, the Medway from the estuary at Sheerness, past Gillingham, Chatham and Rochester to Blue Bell Hill in the west.

The grant has also paid for the new 'Playbuilder' adventure playground for older children, viewing points and interpretation boards. The Friends manage the site with Greenspaces as a welcome green lung for the local community.

It is said that Charles Dickens would walk from Higham to listen to an organ powered by the sails of Field's Mill which stood at Broomhill.

Field's Mill



Windmills on Broomhill, 1890

Grasshopper

Dragonfly

Soldier beetle on ragwort

Ant on vetch

Temple Marsh

Temple Marsh is recognised as one of Kent's important local wildlife sites. Some birds, whose numbers are in decline, are regular visitors to Temple Marsh.

In spring, from late April, listen out for nightingales singing in the scrub around the derelict cement works. Bramble is essential to the whitethroat, a summer visitor, for nesting and food; turtle doves nest in hawthorn and feed on seeds in the short, dry grass. Green woodpeckers can be seen near the river.

Plants such as marjoram, centaury, yellow-wort, milk thistle and kidney vetch are to be found on the waste ground while the small strips of saltmarsh below the river bank support plants including sea aster, sea lavender, glasswort and sea-purslane.

Inter-tidal mudflats are a rich source of food for many waders and wildfowl. Lapwing, redshank, dunlin and shelduck overwinter here whilst the mallard, mute swan, cormorant and gulls can be seen at any time of the year.

The brickfields around Temple Farm produced more than 7.5 million bricks in 1845 alone.

Nightingale

www.andywdler.co.uk

Route directions

Starting from the Strood side of the motorway underpass continue along the unmade road passing Knight's Place Recreation Ground car park to the left, shortly reaching junction with **Albatross Avenue**. Turn left and continue along Albatross Avenue until junction with **Bligh Way**. Cross Albatross Avenue and proceed down Bligh Way for approximately half-a-mile, passing a strip of shops on the right. Cross Bligh Way at zebra crossing and continue on left hand footpath, crossing **Scholars Rise**. Take the next left, **Darnley Close**. Proceed to end and ascend flight of steps leading to **Carnation Road**. **Hyacinth Road** is visible almost directly ahead.

Cross **Carnation Road** to walk up **Hyacinth Road**. This road splits to right and left, take the left hand turn. Continue past two houses on the left shortly reaching some rustic steps to the right leading into **Rede Common**.

Go up the steps and proceed along the main path through a wooded area. Carry on up several small flights of steps. This path ends at a **T-junction**. Take right hand path which almost immediately reaches open grassland. At this point turn left and follow the path along the hedgerow. Continue straight until T-junction, taking time to admire the splendid views on offer. At junction take left hand tree-lined path. Continue along this path, keeping to the right to descend a flight of steps onto **Watling Street**.

M2 motorway bridge over the Medway

Cross **Watling Street** at the lights. Turn right to walk down tree-lined Watling Street. A public footpath (looking more like an unmade road) is quickly reached on the left, opposite **Elaine Avenue**. Turn left and walk up this path which soon becomes a tarmac road. Continue past the bungalows on the right and follow this made road round to the right, between houses and onto **Dean Road**. Dean Road extends directly in front.

At this junction take the path to the left. The road quickly changes to **Leybourne Road**. Walk to the end, where it joins **Abbey Road**.

Cross **Abbey Road** and walk up the narrow pathway just to the right of the post box. This path passes between houses and then open grass space with many trees to join the main path along the **Gravesend Road**. Turn left and walk up the Gravesend Road.

Cross **Abbey Road** again. Almost directly opposite Abbey Road on the other side of the **Gravesend Road** is **Broomhill Road**. This is where the trail is heading.

Dragons Teeth – anti-tank defences from the Second World War – at Canal Road

Cross the **Gravesend Road**. Proceed up **Broomhill Road** on the right hand path and take the first road to the left, **Gorse Road**. This road has no footpath so proceed with care. Walk up to the very end and take the second footpath to the left (**RR5**). Continue past the microwave masts and reservoir on the right to reach an open, hard-surfaced area with a number of adjoining paths. This is **Broomhill Park**. The park offers some great views over the rivers Thames and Medway. Take time to explore.

Take the path on the right. Proceed down many steps, straight through the park. Exit by a flight of steps to a pathway. Turn right and walk a short distance before meeting a pathway to the left leading into a green, open space housing estate. This path runs parallel to **Clarendon Drive**.

Continue along this almost straight path, catching the great views to the right when there is a gap between houses.

Strood Community Trail
In the spring Watling Street is a riot of pink and white blossom with crocuses and daffodils in the broad grass verges. Autumn brings a russet, gold and bronze beauty to it.
Eighty metres above sea level, Rede Common has great views over the river and countryside.
A three-day fair was traditionally held each August in Strood. As well as stalls, music and theatre, there were "wild beasts and birds" belonging to a Mr Pettito, according to an 1812 record.
Local people are designing mosaic artworks which will be sited along the route of the Strood Community Trail.
STROOD
The name Strood is probably derived from Ströd or Ströþ – a marshy land overgrown with brushwood.
Broomhill has always been strategically important. A warning beacon was set up here when the Spanish Armada threatened in 1588.
There was a Roman chalk quarry at Donkey Street.
The Kingswear steam boat used to pick up passengers at Strood Pier. There are plans to refurbish the pier.
A five mile (8km) trail around Strood, taking in its streets, green spaces and riverside heritage
Strood Community Trail
Places marked ● are described overleaf
Start
Underpass
To the Cuxton Community Trail
RECREATION GROUND
REDE COMMON
Watling Street
Rede Court Road
Steps
Bligh Way
Albatross Avenue
Scholars Rise
Carnation Road
Hyacinth Road
Darnley Close
Elaine Avenue
Leybourne Rd
Abbey Road
Gravesend Road
Broomhill Road
Dean Road
Traffic lights
Brompton Farm Road
Gorse Rd
BROOMHILL PARK
Clarendon Drive
Cliffe Road
Mill Road
Bill Street Road
Frindsbury Road
ALL SAINTS CHURCH
Church Green
Banks Rd
Tunnel
Commissioners Road
Saxon Shore Way
Wingrove Drive
STROOD STATION
TOWN CENTRE
High Street
London Road
Gun Lane
Canal Road
Cuxton Road
Priory Rd
JANE'S CREEK
ROCHESTER BRIDGE
Darnley Road
Knight Road
TEMPLE MANOR
TEMPLE MARSH
Footbridge
RIVER MEDWAY
High Speed Rail Link
M2 Motorway
RANSCOMBE FARM RESERVE
Rochester Road
© Crown copyright reserved Kent County Council licence number 100019238, Nov. 2010

Rede Common

View from Broomhill

At the end of **Clarendon Drive** turn right on to **Cliffe Road**, crossing over this road at the first island crossing. After a short distance turn left and walk up the **RR3** public footpath. At the end turn right and continue down this road (**Mill Road**) passing Prospect Cottage and the Millstream Care Home (previously a convent). Approaching the end of Mill Road, English Martyrs Roman Catholic Church is seen on the left just before the junction with the busy **Frindsbury Road**.

All Saints, Frindsbury

Turn left to walk up **Frindsbury Road**. Continue forward on the left hand path passing the front of English Martyrs Church and primary school. Note the Georgian architecture of the house on the other side of Frindsbury Road. Cross **Bill Street Road** and continue forward to reach a pelican crossing. Cross here, continue up the hill and take the first road to the right into **Church Green**. Walk along Church Green, continue under the avenue of lime trees to reach Frindsbury parish church, **All Saints**. Fantastic views and a very large cemetery which is still in use.

Follow the footpath **RR50** through the church grounds and leave by the path to the right. This path ends at a T-junction with another pathway. Turn right and walk down **Donkey Hill** (part of the Saxon Shore Way) enjoying the views. At the end **Commissioners Road** is reached.

Cross over at the road restriction barrier and walk down **Wingrove Drive** (easily visible from restriction barrier). At the end continue forward on the footpath passing the old disused canal lock gates. This path leads to **Canal Road**. Most of this area is awaiting redevelopment so there are a lot of fenced off areas restricting views over the river. Continue along **Canal Road**, passing under the railway bridge where Canal Road joins **Strood High Street** just before **Rochester Bridge**.

Cross over the Strood end of **Rochester Bridge** at the lights. There is a set of steps almost directly in front. Descend these taking the left hand flight heading towards the river. This is part of the old Civic Centre and Aveling and Porter steam roller company sites.

Temple Manor

Follow the path along the walled edge of the River Medway and then **Jane's Creek**, out of the car park. Jane's Creek ends with a boarded walkway to the left leading to Morrisons superstore.

Take this walkway and walk along the front of the store to the other end (or pop in for a comfort break). Use the pathways to cross the store's car park. Cross over the entrance/exit to the car park and continue forward on **Knight Road** to the left of this entrance/exit. This is a light industrial area which also is home to Strood's heritage site **Temple Manor** and leads to the Local Wildlife Site (LWS) of **Temple Marsh**.

Walk along **Knight Road** past the **RR22** to the **RR23**. Turn right and follow this path, which takes you up to a railway footbridge. Use this footbridge to cross the line. There are good views across the river from this path and the bridge. Steam locomotives pass by here on occasion. The trail ends here at the **Cuxton Road**.

From here some choices are:

- Head back into Strood town centre – turn right and walk along the Cuxton Road, past the cemetery. Take the RR22 footpath on the right leading back onto Knight Road.
- Continue towards Ranscombe Farm Nature Reserve, Cuxton and the North Downs Way – turn left and follow the Cuxton Road and then the signs to place of choice.
- Make up your own route home.
- Go back on the same route.

Strood timeline from prehistory to today

350,000BC Nomadic people passed through this area when mammoths and woolly rhino roamed the land. Stone Age tools and hunting weapons have been found, as have the remains of these creatures.

4,000BC During the Neolithic period people began to settle here. They cleared forests, cultivated land for crops and kept animals.

2,000 BC The Bronze Age. People began working in metal, making tools and ornaments. Trade links were created with other parts of the country and the continent. One of the trade routes was probably the track later known as the Pilgrims Way.

500BC The Iron Age. It is thought that the first Medway town was established at Rochester, Strood's neighbour over the river, around this time.

AD43–410 The second Roman invasion took place in AD 43; the Romans headed to London from Dover crossing the Medway downstream of Strood. They built the first known bridge over the river between Rochester and Strood, and built Watling Street, establishing the road to London. An agricultural settlement existed at Frindsbury where there was also a villa.

410–1066 The Roman army left Britain at the start of the 5th century. Saxons from Northern Europe arrived and settled. St Augustine brought Christianity to Britain, establishing a foundation at Rochester in 604. In the 9th and 10th centuries Strood was pillaged by the Danes. A wooden bridge was built across the Medway around 960.

1066–1400 After the Norman Conquest people's lives dominated by the church and a feudal system. Henry II gave Strood, previously a Royal Manor, to the Knights Templar. By 1391 a new stone bridge was built, paid for with money made as a result of the Hundred Years War with France. The Knights Templar gave Newark Hospital to Strood.

1536–1541 The Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII took place. Strood had belonged to the Rochester monastery from 1345 until the dissolution, when it passed to Lord Cobham. Poorer people had previously been cared for by the monasteries and this act resulted in much destitution.

18th century Travel made easier with the advent of stagecoaches; the London to Dover road running through Strood became busier. River traffic increased. Hasted, in his study of Kent (1778-99), said Strood's inhabitants were chiefly seafaring or fishermen, and engaged in dredging oysters.

19th century Cement and brick-making industry established. Strood expanded to provide housing for the workforce. The railway added to the town's importance.

20th century to now Cement industry gone and replaced by more housing, business parks and major retail outlets. Regeneration schemes in progress for the redevelopment of land along the riverside.